



Central Purpose

Reading tests always include questions about the **central purpose** of an informational article. The central purpose is the focus of an informational text. This is what the author most wants you to learn. The central purpose of a news story about manatees in Florida, for example, might be to explain why they are endangered by motorboats.

To find the central purpose, think about all the different facts and ideas in an informational article. Usually, they work together to present the central purpose.

Tips for Success

- Ask yourself what the author most wants you to learn.
- Remember that a selection may contain many true statements that are not the central purpose.
- The central purpose is likely to be a general statement concerning the entire selection.

Read this passage about ants. Think about what the author most wants you to learn.

They go to war, often marching in columns and attacking in unison. They keep cattle in the form of smaller insects that give off honeydew, milk them regularly, and, in some cases, even build barns to shelter them. Some ants plant fungus gardens and gather crops like farmers. Others harvest grain and store it in granaries. Still others have servants and slaves to wait on them. Many ants keep pets in their homes. In fact, it is said that the ants have domesticated more different kinds of creatures than man has!

Sometimes, tropical ants live in great cities that contain half a million inhabitants. Their nests have been known to occupy as much as three hundred cubic yards of earth. Finally, like man and unlike most insects, ants live for years. Workers have a life span up to seven years and queens have been known to live eighteen years. The same underground cities are sometimes occupied for half a century, one generation of ants "inheriting real estate" from the generation before.

—Edwin Way Teale, *The Junior Book of Ants*

1. The central purpose of this passage is
 - A. to show that ants are amazing insects.
 - B. to explain that ants have a variety of food supplies.
 - C. to suggest that ants resemble humans in a variety of ways.
 - D. to suggest that we can learn about human society by studying ants.

Mark your answer choice by filling in the oval.

Now check to see whether you chose the correct answer.

- A. Ants are indeed amazing, but this isn't the central purpose of the piece.
- B. This is true, but it's not the main focus of the text.
- C. This is the correct answer. All the examples in the passage work to express this central purpose.
- D. The author may imply this, but it's not the main purpose of the article.

Test Practice

In this passage from *Aku-Aku*, Thor Heyerdahl describes gigantic statues he saw at Rano Raraku, a volcanic mountain on Easter Island in the Pacific Ocean. As you read, think about the central purpose.

... And in the midst of the mountain's gaping wound lie more than a hundred and fifty gigantic stone men, in all stages from the just begun to the just completed. At the foot of the mountain stand finished stone men side by side like a supernatural army.

... Dismounting from your horse in the shadow of a great block of stone, you see that the block has features on its underside: it is the head of a fallen giant. All twenty-three of our expedition could creep under it and find shelter in a rainstorm. On going up to the foremost figures, which are buried in the earth up to their chests, you are shocked to find that you cannot even reach up to the

colossi's chins. And if you try to climb onto those which lie flat on their backs, you feel a regular Lilliputian because often you have the greatest difficulty even in getting up onto their stomachs. And once up on a prostrate Goliath you can walk about freely on his chest and stomach, or stretch yourself out on his nose, which often is as long as an ordinary bed. Thirty feet is no uncommon height for these figures. The largest, which lay unfinished and aslant on the side of the volcano, was sixty-nine feet long, so that, counting a story as ten feet, this stone man was as tall as a seven-story building.

1. (A) (B) (C) (D)
2. (A) (B) (C) (D)
3. (A) (B) (C) (D)

Match the best answer for questions 1-3.

1. The author's central purpose in this passage is:
 - A. to tell that the statues at the site are incomplete or lying on their sides.
 - B. to show that the statues are buried up to their chests in earth.
 - C. to explain that the statues range in size from thirty to almost seventy feet long.
 - D. to show that the statues make humans feel tiny.

2. You can infer that Lilliputians are
 - A. undersized people.
 - B. stone carvers.
 - C. vacationers or travelers.
 - D. members of an ancient tribe.
3. The clues in the text suggest that prostrate means
 - A. made of stone.
 - B. broken into pieces.
 - C. lying flat.
 - D. unfinished.

4. Write two questions you would like to ask Thor Heyerdahl about these statues.
